



WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH IN MISSISSIPPI

*From The
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health*



State Profile 2002

*Delivering on the Nation's promise:
Safety and health at work for all people through prevention.*

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

NIOSH is the primary federal agency responsible for conducting research and making recommendations for the prevention of work-related illness and injury. NIOSH is located in the Department of Health and Human Services in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The NIOSH mission is to provide national and world leadership to prevent work-related illness, injury, disability, and death by gathering information, conducting scientific research, and translating the knowledge gained into products and services. As part of its mission, NIOSH supports programs in every state to improve the health and safety of workers. NIOSH has developed this document to highlight recent NIOSH programs important to workers and employers in Mississippi.

The Burden of Occupational Illness and Injury in Mississippi

- In Mississippi, there are approximately 1.3 million individuals employed in the workforce.¹
- In 2000, 125 workers died as a result of workplace injuries.²
- The manufacturing industry had the highest number of fatalities, followed second by transportation and public utilities, and third by construction.²
- In 1999, the most recent year for which data are available, the rate of fatal workplace injuries was 10.6 deaths per 100,000 workers—above the national average rate of 4.5 deaths per 100,000 workers.³

The Cost of Occupational Injury and Illness in Mississippi

In 2000, the most recent year for which data are available, a total of \$269.2 million was paid for workers' compensation claims by Mississippi private insurers and self-insured employers.⁴ This figure does not include compensation paid to workers employed by the federal government and also underestimates the total financial burden for private sector businesses, since only a fraction of health care costs and earnings lost through work injuries and illnesses is covered by workers' compensation. Chronic occupational illnesses like cancer are substantially under-reported in workers' compensation systems because work-relatedness is often difficult to establish.

How NIOSH Prevents Worker Injuries and Diseases in Mississippi

Health Hazard Evaluations (HHEs) and Technical Assistance

NIOSH evaluates workplace hazards and recommends solutions when requested by employers, workers, or state or federal agencies. Since 1993, NIOSH has responded to seven requests for HHEs in Mississippi in a variety of industrial settings, including the following example:

Mississippi: Skin Diseases Among Grocery Store Workers

In 1998-99, NIOSH responded to a request for assistance from the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) in an OSHA inspection involving skin diseases among workers at two grocery stores in Oxford and Cleveland, Mississippi. The NIOSH investigation found no evidence of any contagious infectious diseases in these workplaces. Recommendations included reassigning any worker with an open wound on the hand to a job that does not involve handling food, reporting and investigating all work injuries and work-related skin problems, using vinyl or plastic gloves for food handling to avoid possible allergic reactions to natural products such as latex gloves, and following a combination of additional specific strategies at all work sites to prevent occupational skin diseases.

Fire Fighter Fatality Investigation and Prevention Program

The purpose of the NIOSH Fire Fighter Fatality Investigation and Prevention Program is to determine factors that cause or contribute to fire fighter deaths suffered in the line of duty. NIOSH uses data from these investigations to generate fatality investigation reports and a database of case results that guides the development of prevention and intervention activities. The following fire fighter fatality investigation was conducted in Mississippi:

Mississippi: Commercial Building Fire Claims the Lives of Two Volunteer Fire Fighters

On August 29, 1998, two male volunteer fire fighters, ages 35 and 21, died of smoke inhalation during a fire at a commercial building. The first victim was trapped inside the building when its roof collapsed. The second victim, who was attempting to ventilate the roof of the building, fell through the roof and was also trapped. Neither victim was wearing a Personal Alert Safety System (PASS) device, a small electronic device which emits a loud alarm if the person wearing it becomes motionless for more than 30 seconds. In addition, after several attempts to rescue the victims, all fire fighters at the scene had exhausted their air supply and had to wait for additional bottles of breathing air to arrive. NIOSH investigators recommended fire departments use defensive tactics when lacking adequate apparatus, equipment, and training; ensure accountability for all personnel at the scene; implement an incident command system with written standard operating procedures; ensure that fire fighters entering burning or suspected unsafe structures are equipped with two-way communications with incident command; establish standard operating procedures for conducting vertical ventilation; enforce the use of PASS devices; and ensure that adequate personal protective equipment is available.

Additional information regarding NIOSH services and activities can be accessed through the NIOSH home page at <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/homepage.html> or by calling the NIOSH 800-number at 1-800-356-NIOSH (1-800-356-4674).

¹U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Current Population Survey, 2000.

²DOL, BLS in cooperation with state and federal agencies, Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, 1999-2000.

³National Academy of Social Insurance, *Workers' Compensation: Benefits, Coverage, and Costs, 2000 New Estimates*, May 2002.